

Malaysia's United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (1960-2009): Significance of Malaysia's middlepowermanship and elites aspiration

ABSTRACT

Most troops state-contributors to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) come from small and developing countries. Malaysia is one of those which have been significant state-contributors to UNPKO since 1960. This paper examines key imperatives that influence Malaysia's variable commitment in UNPKO from 1960-2009. Library research, field work, content analysis and interviews were among the methods used. This paper argues that Malaysia has used UNPKO to build and consolidate its middlepowermanship aspiration. Evidently, it is poised to help Malaysia steadily create and retain its considerable soft power and international prestige so integral to its quest for a non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC), among other things. Insofar, Malaysia has been elected four times into the UNSC. As a small power, Malaysia compensates its lack of hard power with soft power made possible by its notable activism in UNPKO. This, in turn, can be traced to identical Malaysian elites' aspiration, of which common political base has been in power since 1957. This paper also helps to fill up the gap in theoretical and empirical aspects of studies on Malaysia's UNPKO. The data collected shows that, in more ways than one, Malaysia's UNPKO was heavily influenced by the overriding influence of systemic imperatives and not solely by Malaysia domestic imperatives as the extant literature commonly point to. This was particularly evident when Malaysia participated in more UNPKO in the post-Cold War era as opposed to during the Cold War. Yet, the paper has also found that Malaysian elites' preference for UNPKO, to some extent, hinges on other imperatives that eventually determined Malaysia's UNPKO such as the size, location and tenure. However, these imperatives are secondary as opposed to systemic. For future research, this study suggests a comparative analysis of countries with virtually similar characteristics vis-a-vis their commitments to UNPKO.